

Philippians 1:12-30
Gospel Centered Living

Introduction

1. Last week we began our study of Philippians and worked our way through Paul's introduction
2. I titled that lesson "Gospel Centered Relationships" because it revealed much about the relationship between Paul and the Philippians
3. We saw that the gospel was at the center of their relationship:
 - a. It was revealed in Paul's thankfulness for their partnership with him in the Gospel
 - b. It was also revealed in not only how Paul prayed for them, but in the content of what he prayed
4. Today, I am titled this lesson Gospel Centered Living because this passage reveals what it means to live with the Gospel at the center of one's life

A. Gospel centered living means that we choose to see the circumstances of our lives in light of God's plan for the spreading of the Gospel (1:12-18)

1. Paul knew that his current circumstances resulted in the further spread of the Gospel (12-14):
"Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel..."
 - a. His "current circumstances" was likely the Mamertime Prison in Rome
 - 1) More like a dungeon than today's prisons
 - 2) Built between 600 and 500 BC as a cistern for water, but later converted to a prison with two cells, one on top of the other
 - 3) The bottom chamber was 6.5 feet high, 30 feet long and 22 feet wide and is where condemned prisoners were left to die (often by starvation)
 - 4) It was part of the sewer system, 12 feet underground and the only entrance was a small hole in the ceiling through which prisoners were lowered
 - 5) Ancient historian Sallust described it as "**disgusting and vile by reason of the filth, the darkness and the stench**"—the only entrance to it was through a hole in the ceiling
 - 6) Paul was likely kept in the top chamber, but none-the-less it would have been an absolutely miserable place
 - b. His imprisonment resulted in furthering the Gospel in at least two ways:
 - 1) First, it impacted unbelievers (13): **"my imprisonment in Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else"**
 - a) There is some debate as to the meaning of the word praetorian since it can refer to the Governor's palace (i.e. where Jesus was taken after his arrest) or to the Governor's elite soldiers known as the Praetorian Guard
 - b) Most English translations render it appropriately as a reference to the soldiers
 - c) The Praetorian Guard was the secret service and special forces of Ancient Rome, the elite of the elite, hand-picked soldiers
 - d) In Paul's day they numbered about 10,000
 - e) Paul stresses two things here:

- It was the entire (“whole”) Praetorian Guard, as well as others associated with them (probably other government officials), that knew of his circumstance
 - They knew not just that he was a prisoner, but that his imprisonment was directly related to his faith in Jesus Christ
- 2) Second, it impacted believers (14): **“and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear”**:
 - 1) Other believers had become emboldened by Paul’s imprisonment (perfect participle; ESV **“having become confident”**)—the root word Paul used means to have become persuaded by something
 - 2) Paul’s imprisonment--his chains--had become a lightning rod for others to **“speak the word of God”** with far more courage and less fear
 2. Paul not only accepted this, but rejoiced in it (15-17):
 - a. The depth to which Paul believed and accepted this is found in the next three verses
 - b. Some were preaching Christ from improper motives (15):
 - 1) **“from envy and strife”** (or better understood as **“envy and rivalry”** per the ESV, NET and NIV)
 - 2) **“out of selfish ambition rather than pure motives”** (17)
 - 3) Seeking to **“cause me distress in my imprisonment”** (or as the NET and NIV **“because they think they can cause trouble for me in my imprisonment”**)
 - c. Others, however, were preaching Christ **“out of love, knowing that [Paul was] appointed for the defense of the gospel”** (16)
 - d. Regardless of the motives of these men, Paul rejoiced because Christ was made known (18a): **“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice...”**
 - 1) V. 18 serves as a transitionary verse
 - 2) The first part expresses his rejoicing over the fact that the Gospel has been advanced because of his imprisonment
 - 3) In the second part of the verse he repeats the fact that he will rejoice (**“Yes, and I will rejoice...”**), but adds another reason for doing so which brings me to the second thing we can learn about gospel centered living
 3. So, Paul chose to see his circumstances, whatever happened to him in life, in light of God’s plan and purpose for the spread of the Gospel. That’s Gospel centered living.
 4. What about us?
 - a. How do we view the circumstances of our lives?
 - b. When things don’t go the way we expect, do we whine and complain? Or do we ask how this might further God’s plan for the Gospel?

B. Gospel centered living means that our ambitions are to exalt Christ and minister to others (18-26)

1. As Paul continues his rejoicing we learn of his two primary ambitions in life:
2. His FIRST AMBITION was to exalt Jesus Christ (18-21):

- a. He begins by expressing his confidence that he would ultimately be released from prison (18b-17): **“Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ...”**
 - b. However, he then tells his readers that whether or not that happens, his ultimate desire is to exalt Jesus (20): **“according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”**
 - 1) For Paul, what mattered was not whether he was released, but whether he would dishonor Christ by being **“put to shame in anything”** (i.e. that he would not be ashamed of his behavior or actions)
 - 2) Rather, he prayed for the **“boldness”** he needed so that Christ would be **“exalted in my body, whether by life or by death”**
 - a) What does it mean to exalt Christ?
 - b) The word Paul used, *megaluno*, means to make something great, or to show respect to someone, to hold in high honor
 - c) In other words, Paul’s passion was that no matter what happened, his life would honor and lift up Christ
 - 3) This, he claims, was his **“earnest expectation and hope”**
 - c. Paul’s ambition for exalting Christ was based in a simple principle (21): **“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”**
 - 1) In this earthly life, Paul had no life apart from Christ—so to live meant life with, for and in Jesus Christ—**in other words, His life was consumed by his relationship with Jesus!**
 - 2) But, he also knew that to die would be **“gain”**—eternity with Christ
 - 3) This set up a dilemma for Paul and leads to his second ambition
3. His SECOND AMBITION is related to the first, and it was for his life to benefit others (22-26):
- a. Paul faced a bit of a rhetorical dilemma (22-24): **“But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.”**
 - 1) He knew that being released from prison and continuing to live would allow him to continue his ministry:
 - a) It would result in more **“fruitful labor”**
 - b) It was **“more necessary”** for the Philippians’ sake (24)
 - c) This is where we see Paul’s second ambition—his desire to be used by God to help others come to know and then grow in their relationship with Christ (see also **Colossians 1:24-29**)
 - 2) However, he also had the **“desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better”** (23)
 - b. In the end, however, Paul was convinced that God’s plan was for him to remain and be used here (25-26): **“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.”**

4. So Paul's greatest ambitions were to exalt Jesus Christ and minister to others. That's Gospel centered living.
5. So, again, I ask, What about us? What are our greatest ambitions?
 - a. When you think about where you invest your time, your energy, your money, etc. what does it say about your ambitions?
 - b. Where does exalting Christ and helping/ministering to others fall in your list of priorities?

C. Gospel centered living means that we live our lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel (27-30)

1. In these closing verses of our passage today, Paul repeats a theme similar to the one found in the book of Ephesians (27): **"Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,"**
2. In Ephesians, he was focusing more on behavior—putting off the old man and putting on the new; living in the power and influence of the Holy Spirit
3. Here, he is talking about remaining strong in the face of opposition and continuing to live in a way that furthers the Gospel (27b): **"so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents-- which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God."**
 - a. This would require that they were **"standing firm in one spirit"** (later defined as sharing the same mind and purpose)
 - b. It meant that they would continue to **"with one mind strive together for the faith of the gospel"**:
 - 1) Many of the translations say something like working or striving **"side by side"**
 - 2) The NIV says, **"contending as one man for the faith of the gospel"**
 - 3) "the faith of the gospel" is an appositional genitive—"the faith, which is the Gospel"
 - c. It meant that they must not **"be alarmed by your opponents"**—in other words, that they wouldn't be intimidated by those who opposed them, but would continue to live out the truths of their faith

Do you think this applies to us today? Do you think the world is trying to intimidate us into being silent or changing our convictions?

- d. It meant that they must not only believe in Christ, but be willing to suffer the same fate both Jesus and Paul did (29-30): **"For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me."**
 - e. Living a life worthy of the Gospel means that we live our lives in a way that contributes to the spread of the Gospel, even when facing opposition and persecution
 - f. And, did you notice that we are to do this TOGETHER (go back and read the underlined words above)?
4. So, how do we do on this?

- a. Do we sit back quietly, just trying to fit in and get along?
- b. Do we back down when called haters, bigots, mean-spirited, unloving, judgmental?
- c. Or, do we stand firm, striving together for the faith of the Gospel by living out the Truths of God's Word and the convictions of our faith—in spite of the opposition?

Conclusion

- 1. Do we live a Gospel Centered life? The answer lies in three questions?
- 2. Do we see all of the circumstances of our lives—good or bad—as opportunities for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ?
- 3. What are our greatest ambitions in life? Are they something other than exalting Jesus Christ and ministering to others?
- 4. Do we conduct ourselves—live our lives—in a manner worthy of the Gospel?